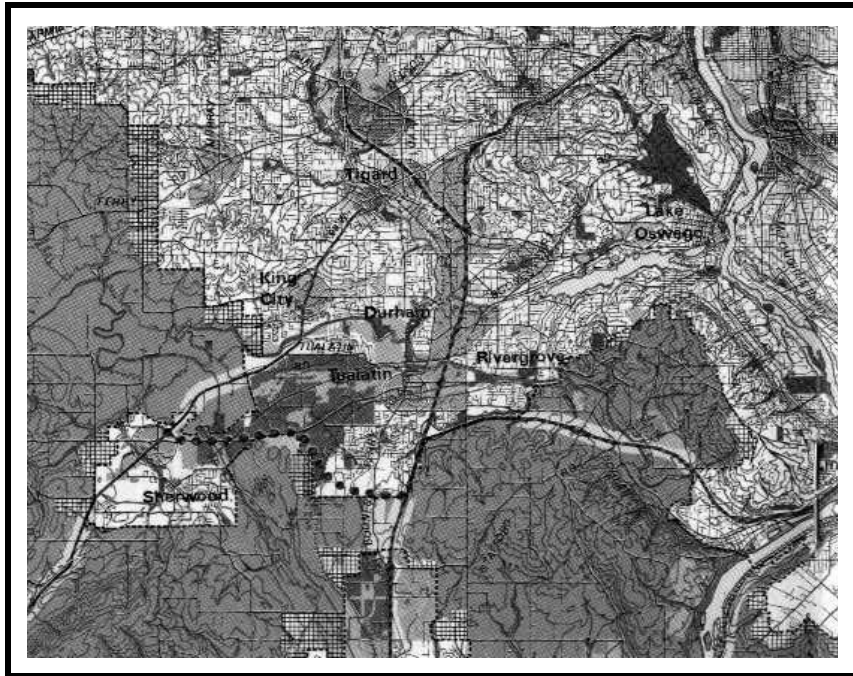


Chapter 4

Sustainable Suburban Downtown Redevelopment

Redevelopment should always be a central part of a region's growth policy. It represents the best utilization of our existing infrastructure and the best opportunity to preserve open space.
-- Peter Calthorpe¹



Metro's Region 2040 map shows the central city of Portland plus Milwaukie, Beaverton, Lake Oswego, Tualatin, and others. Metro.

A number of comprehensive, large-scale redevelopment activities are occurring or are planned for suburban areas across the United States. These include redevelopment of failed shopping malls

and retail centers, abandoned infrastructure such as airports and freeways, outdated amusement parks and other public facilities, closed defense bases, and areas stricken by natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods. Perhaps the most important redevelopment efforts, however, are those that center on the suburban core--the downtown or city center.

This chapter discusses suburban downtown redevelopment by first detailing the need for and value of such redevelopment; presenting a brief summary of other redevelopment activities (both city and suburban) that were initially evaluated; and finally discussing similarities and differences between two downtown redevelopment efforts discussed in detail in the next two chapters, Suisun City, California (pronounced suh-SOON), and Tualatin, Oregon (pronounced TWAH-luh-tin). These case studies demonstrate that redevelopment of suburban downtown areas can accomplish a number of economic, environmental, and social goals, which combined lead to a sustainable community.

Redevelopment in the Regional Context

Regional collaboration and decision-making can be a viable tool for counteracting the negative effects of sprawl. Fortunately, its use is becoming more and more evident, for local city and suburban government decisions greatly affect municipal neighbors and adjacent unincorporated areas. Efforts to control sprawl by developing and redeveloping in a sustainable manner in fact can be effectively thwarted if neighboring entities do not subscribe to similar growth philosophies. Taxation policies in Massachusetts have driven many workers to set up residence in New Hampshire, where residential sprawl is subsequently flourishing. Restrictions on extending infrastructure in the Portland metropolitan area have caused the suburban Vancouver, Washington--with considerably fewer development restrictions--to mushroom. And limits on the number of building permits in Boulder, Colorado, have in part resulted in the virtual overnight creation of bedroom communities like Rock Creek.

In an effort to combat these adverse side effects, regional governmental units such as the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) and Portland's Metro have developed long-range plans which call for one central city (or perhaps two in cases such as Minneapolis-St. Paul and San Francisco-Oakland) with supporting regional and town centers: suburban downtowns.

DRCOG's recently finalized *Metro Vision 2020*, for example, calls for regional development that densifies both the city of Denver and particular satellite centers--the cities of Boulder, Longmont, Brighton, and Castle Rock--and urban centers, which have yet to be determined.² Planners hope that the *Vision* will allow metropolitan communities to preserve more natural and agricultural open space between urbanized areas and provide distinct community cores linked by viable transit.



Street-level retail is pedestrian-scaled in San Diego's Uptown District. S. Buntin.

Similarly, Metro's *Region 2040* growth concept calls for a more compact form of growth based on a municipal hierarchy which

provides that downtown Portland serve as the “hub of business and cultural activity in the metropolitan region... [with] the most intensive form of development for both housing and employment,” while regional centers (including downtown Hillsboro and downtown Oregon City) and town centers (such as Lake Oswego and Tualatin) “are characterized by compact employment and housing development served by high-quality transit, [and have] a strong sense of community identity [while providing] localized services to residents within a two- to three-mile radius....”³

The largest question facing these urban cores and town centers may well be: How do we redevelop our suburban centers so as to promote effective regional growth? In other words, how do suburbs physically redevelop for a viable future?

Advantages of Redeveloping Suburban Downtowns

There should be little question that--in order to counteract sprawl’s often devastating effects--suburban communities need to redevelop land uses that are economically, environmentally, and socially costly. The areas to focus on first and foremost--to achieve both local and regional goals--are the downtowns.

Downtowns earn priority for several reasons. First, growth

is most appropriately channeled into city centers. In order to effectively accept population growth while preserving surrounding natural and agricultural lands, urban densities must be increased. Existing downtowns and city centers are historically, structurally, and symbolically the best recipients of higher densities. While other parts of suburbs will likely increase density, as well, growth can generally be more accommodated at city centers, where infrastructure such as utilities, streets, parks, and emergency services is already in place.

Second, downtowns provide the urban hub that is necessary to support transit, large employment centers, and civic, cultural, and other activities. Businesses, for example, historically congregate at city centers. Though metropolitan areas have become increasingly polycentric, they generally still retain a monocentric core that provides the opportunity for a high level of economic and social interaction. But even in polycentric metropolitan areas, where suburban cores tend to be of a higher density than surrounding areas, the opportunity to further densify suburban centers is present.

Third, suburbs need a sense of community identity. The best way to develop the sense appears to be through redevelopment of downtowns--establishing a renewed core. While redeveloping peripheral suburban locations may provide a sense of place at the neighborhood, for example, redeveloping downtowns will provide a

sense of place for the entire community.

And fourth, viable downtowns are necessary for the establishment of municipal hierarchies in regional growth management schemes. Regional plans in Portland, Denver, and other metropolitan areas call for regional hierarchies to effectively support new growth, as mentioned previously. Redeveloping shopping centers or other areas cannot provide the central focus that comes with strong suburban downtowns, which logically fit into the hierarchies.

There are a number of advantages associated with the redevelopment of suburban downtowns, and these fall into four categories: centrality, economic viability, environmental preservation, and social support.

Centrality

- Suburban downtown redevelopment provides a central public space, or spaces, where citizens of all orientations can congregate for pleasure, business, and political reasons, and where events of community significance, such as festivals, can take place.
- It allows suburbs to link the core to other areas of the city--built and natural--through pathways and transit systems that are affordable and available to all residents and visitors.
- It provides the opportunity for the suburb to become a regional draw--especially when regional transit systems are linked to the renewed center--and therefore increase use and income.

Economic Viability

- Suburban downtown redevelopment integrates a mix of uses during the day and night in the city's center, providing a critical mass of residents to support local businesses and other uses.
- It provides a new mix of recreational, housing, and business opportunities in the city center.
- It provides increased tax base and other economic benefits for the suburb itself as residential and business opportunities increase.

Environmental Preservation

- Suburban downtown redevelopment enables the suburb to restore and enhance the natural landscape, either onsite or on adjacent areas, when densities in the core itself are increased.
- It allows communities to conserve resources by implementing historically proven and/or technologically advanced resource reduction and reuse systems.

Social Support

- Suburban downtown redevelopment allows the community to increase its sense of pride and civic well-being, especially in a regional context, when a distinguishable core is created.
- It provides the opportunity for suburbs to build--architecturally and symbolically--upon their history, or create a new identity for what the suburb wants to be.
- It allows the suburb to place people over automobiles, reducing pedestrian-auto conflicts, decreasing the need to own autos, and eliminating associated adverse side effects.

- It allows the suburb to provide safe, adequate, and aesthetically pleasing (or hidden) infrastructure for new and planned uses.



Geographic locations of Suisun City, Tualatin, and other redevelopment project cities. S. Buntin.

Other Sustainable Redevelopment Projects

Redevelopment should be applied wherever possible, not solely in downtown areas. Though suburban downtowns should have priority given the regional context, a number of factors will affect which sites actually are redeveloped. These include ease of redevelopment, cost, timing, community involvement or resistance, and others.

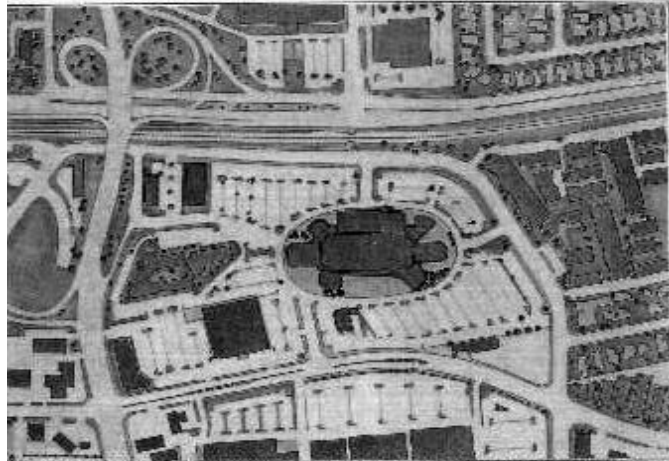
Five redevelopment projects were evaluated in addition to

Suisun City and Tualatin Commons. Though they were not chosen for inclusion as case studies, they too demonstrate that redevelopment is a viable option for suburban communities.

The Crossings

The Crossings in Mountain View, California--a suburban city located between San Francisco and San Jose--is a neotraditional redevelopment of a 1960s auto-oriented shopping mall which failed in the early 1990s. Designed by Calthorpe Associates, it is an 18-acre project comprised primarily of high-density, single-family homes and townhomes with narrow streets, "pocket" parks, and orientation around a planned CalTrain commuter station.⁴ While the original plans called for 52,000 square feet of retail, the developer has requested a reduction--based on preliminary evaluations of residential usage and the fact that The Crossings is adjacent to many retail sites--to 2,000 square feet.⁵

The Crossings is unique for many reasons. First, the city's role in redevelopment was limited primarily to creation of a precise

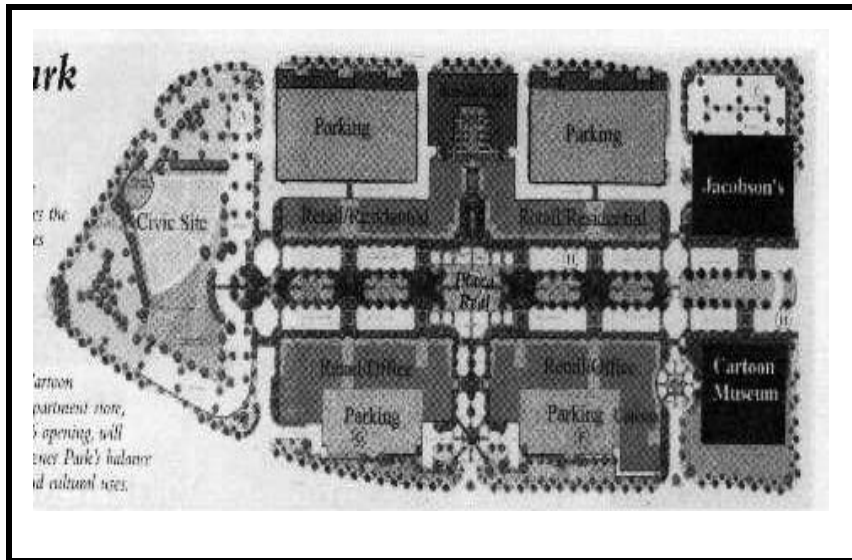


The Crossings site plans, before (top) and after (bottom). Calthorpe Associates.

plan for the area (*San Antonio Station Precise Plan*), its version of a specific plan. The plan sets forth criteria for the mall's redevelopment, calling for medium- to high-density development to be master planned as a single entity, primary residential use, transit and pedestrian orientation, and a "distinctive neighborhood center."⁶ Second, the developer reused concrete and asphalt from the mall's structure and parking lots as fill for the site and in the concrete used for front porches and foundations.⁷ And third, it is an example of neotraditional design criteria applied to a redeveloped site. Such criteria include front porches, garages set back from the front of the house or hidden in the back of the townhome, narrow streets and wide sidewalks, lush landscaping, street furniture, a modified street grid pattern, design around a mass transit stop, and high density. At buildout, density will fall between 25 and 30 homes per acre.⁷

Mizner Park

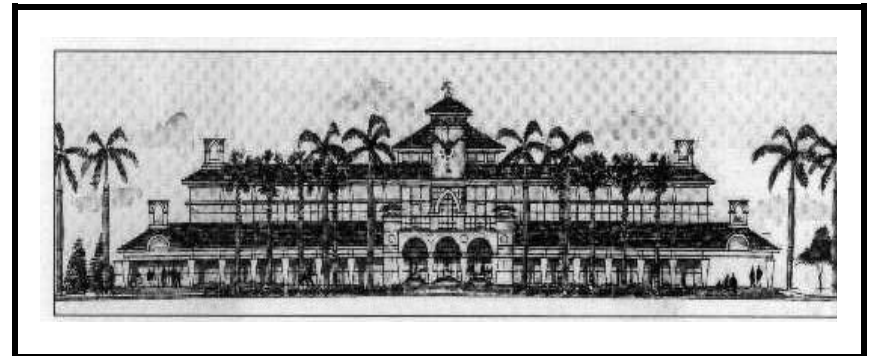
Mizner Park is a high-density, mixed-use redevelopment of the Boca Raton Mall in the suburban town of Boca Raton, Florida--located between Miami and West Palm Beach. The mall failed in the mid-1980s, replaced by the 28-acre project which is comprised of 272 housing units, 236,000 square feet of retail, 262,000 square feet of office space, and a linear public plaza anchored on one end by a park and amphitheater, and on the other by the L'Atelier D'Art bell tower



Mizner Park site plan. Center for Livable Communities.

and the International Museum of Cartoon Art.⁹

Mizner Park is unique for many reasons. It is perhaps first and foremost the epitome of how redevelopment can be economically successful. During the first few weeks after opening, shops sold out of inventory and restaurants ran out of food; since then, the restaurants and AMC theater have become among the most successful in the nation, retail sales continue to increase, retail and office space is continually leased to capacity, and apartments and condominiums have long waiting lists of prospective residents.¹⁰ Mizner Park is also an example of how good physical design and



Mizner Park's International Museum of Cartoon Art. Center for Livable Communities.

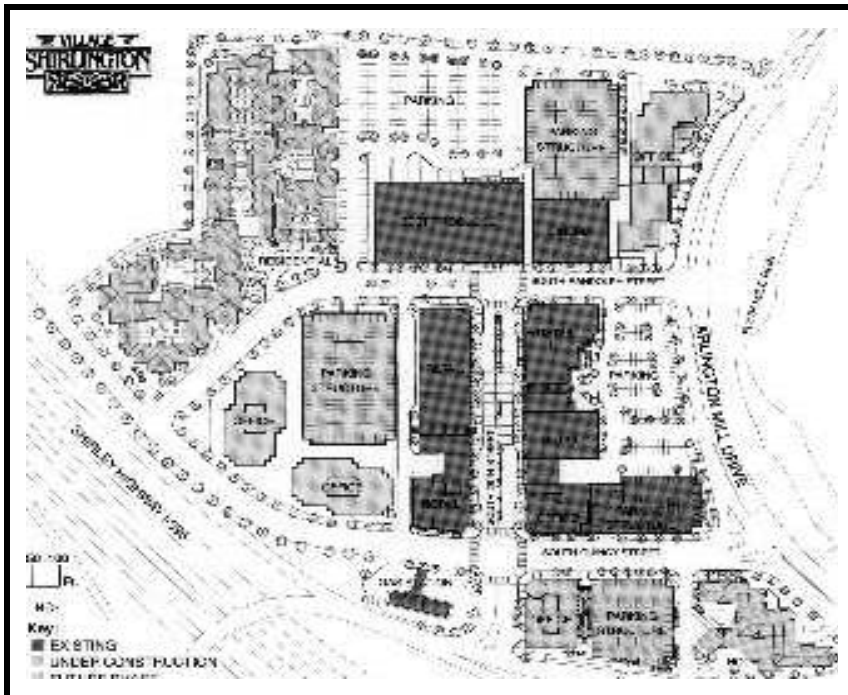
architecture can create livable places: the design of the public plaza and Southern Florida-style architecture are inviting and well-used. Finally, the city and developer worked hand in hand. The city held a referendum at the developer's request to invite community input on its proposal for Mizner Park, and the city leases land back to the developer.¹¹ Additionally, tax increment financing in the amount of \$58 million was used for site improvements and construction.¹²

The Village at Shirlington

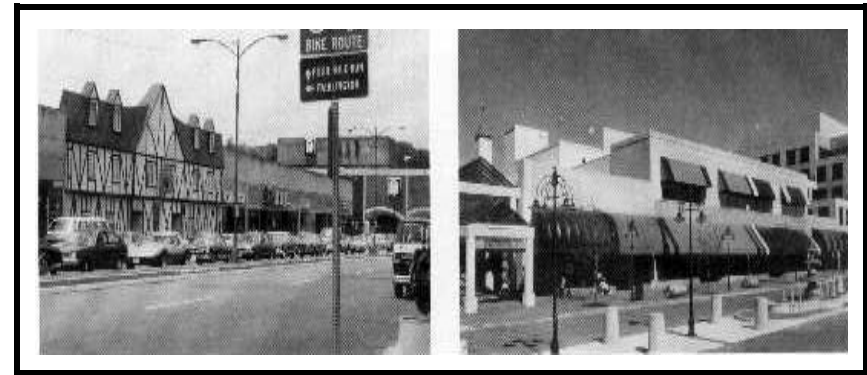
The Village at Shirlington is a high-density 25-acre redevelopment of a 1940s community shopping center in Arlington, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, DC. The project centers around a new "Main Street" adorned with awnings, arcades, landscaping, streetscaping, and other pedestrian-scaled details, and includes 490

residential units (primarily apartments); five office buildings; 280,000 square feet of retail including a theater, department store, grocery store, and boutique retail space; and parking structures.¹³

It is unique for several reasons. First, Arlington County's commercial zoning allows mixed-use development, so rezoning and



The Village at Shirlington's Phase I site plan. Urban Land Institute.



The Village at Shirlington--before (left) and after (right). Urban Land Institute.

plan amendments were not necessary before or during construction.¹⁴ Second, the project reuses the structure of much of the previous mall building itself, restoring original limestone and granite facades while building up from the main structure.¹⁵ Third, the developer incorporated and is subsidizing a grocery store on the plaza level at the request of the community.¹⁶ And finally, the “Main Street” and surrounding The Village at Shirlington--the first phase of which was completed in 1987--has spurred additional residential development around it, securing it as the true neighborhood center for a rapidly growing area.¹⁷

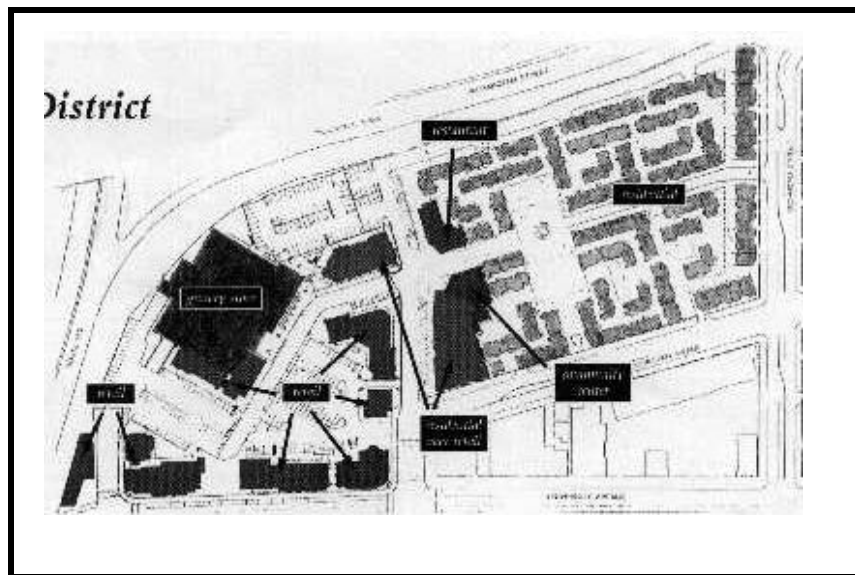
Uptown District

San Diego's Uptown District is a redevelopment of a 14-acre Sears store and adjacent parking lots into a mixed-use, high-density neighborhood that includes a large grocery store; 100,000 square feet of specialty, street-oriented retail uses and restaurants; a community center; parks, courtyards, and green space; and 318 residential units that include townhomes, "flats," and artists' lofts.¹⁸

Uptown District is unique in many ways. Located in the Hillcrest neighborhood, the project placed all residential parking

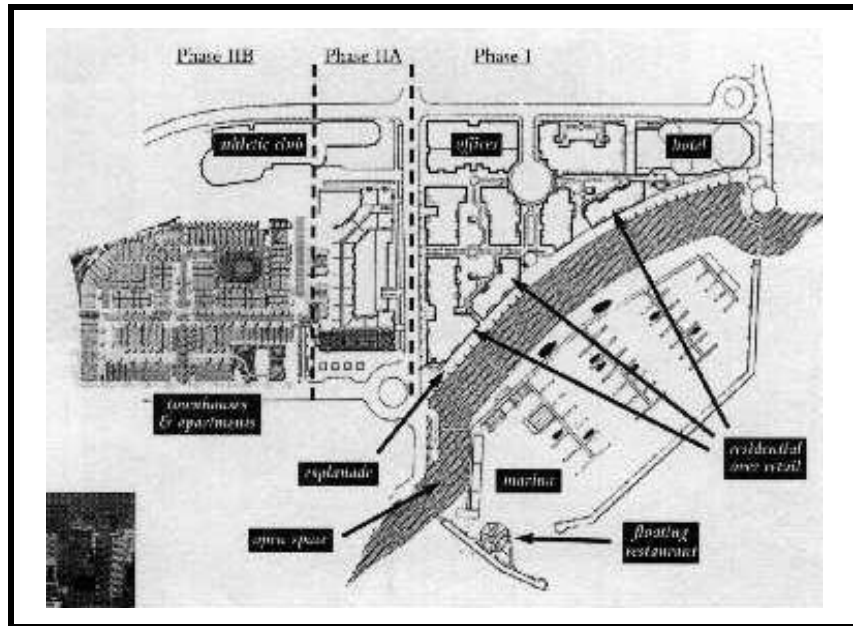


Uptown District's pedestrian-only residential level. S. Buntin.



Uptown District site plan. Center for Livable Communities.

underground, and laid out a network of pedestrian-only streets around a central park.¹⁹ The redevelopment is anchored by Southern California's largest grossing Ralph's grocery store, yet the supermarket has only a minimal sign on the arterial road, is not adjacent to a large parking lot (most parking is below ground), and is "designed to be inconspicuous."²⁰ The community was involved extensively in the redevelopment process, using a workshop approach called "Project Head Start" hosted by the developer to craft ideas that helped the developer win the bid.²¹ And because home ownership is a goal of interested community groups, residents who rented during



RiverPlace site plan. Center for Livable Communities.

the first two phases were given right of first refusal when the units came up for sale.²²

RiverPlace

Portland's RiverPlace is an on-going mixed-use redevelopment on the site of a freeway that was demolished in the 1970s, adjacent to the Willamette River and the city's Waterfront Park. The first two phases cover nearly eleven acres and include 480 units of housing--condominiums, apartments, and townhomes--, 26,000 square feet of retail, 41,600 square feet of office space, a

luxury hotel, marina with floating restaurant, athletic club, esplanade, and open space along the river.²³ Recently, a super-efficient corporate headquarters building utilizing "green" construction techniques such as recycled materials and reduced waste, as well as reduced water and wastewater onsite, was constructed adjacent to the residential units.²⁴

Among RiverPlace's many notable facets is that it is primarily high-level housing, but in Phase IIB includes a number of low-income



Phases IIA and IIB of RiverPlace--retail on first level, and residential above. Center for Livable Communities.

units as required by Portland's *Downtown Development Plan*.²⁵

Additionally, the spaces between buildings are woven with pedestrian paths, lush landscaping, detailed architecture that hides items such as parking structures and trash receptacles, and street furniture.

RiverPlace is a prime example of Portland's Sustainable City Principles, developed in late 1994. The goal of these principles is to "promote a sustainable future that meets today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and accepts its responsibility to: (1) Support a stable, diverse, and equitable economy; (2) Protect the quality of the air, water, and other natural resources; (3) Conserve native vegetation, fish, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystems; and, 4) Minimize human impacts on local and worldwide systems."²⁶

The table on the following page shows a matrix of the five redevelopment projects compared to the fourteen properties of sustainable redevelopment presented in the previous chapter.



Portland, Oregon, uses principles of sustainability to ensure that new and redevelopment projects, such as RiverPlace, are viable. Portland Chamber of Commerce.

Other Projects Sustainable Redevelopment Matrix

Sustainable Suburban Downtown Redevelopment

The Crossings, Mizner Park, The Village at Shirlington, Uptown District, and RiverPlace

<i>Properties</i>	The Crossings	Mizner Park	The Village at Shirlington	Uptown District	RiverPlace
High-density, mixed-use core	Yes ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pedestrian orientation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Transit orientation	Yes ²	Yes ⁵	Yes ⁵	Yes ⁵	Yes ⁸
Regionalized architecture, site design, and landscaping	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public spaces	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Protection, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment	Yes ⁶	Yes ⁶	No	Yes ⁶	Yes
Energy efficiency and renewable energy use in buildings	Yes ¹¹	Yes ¹¹	Yes ¹¹	Yes ¹¹	Yes ¹¹
“Green” construction	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Integrated solid and toxic waste minimization	Yes ³	Yes ³	Yes ³	Yes ³	Yes ³
Water and wastewater reduction and reuse	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Local production of goods, including food	No	No ⁷	No	No ⁷	No ⁷
Affordable housing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Building reuse and historic preservation	No ¹⁰	No	Yes	No	No ⁹
Integration with surrounding neighborhoods	No ⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes from Matrix

1. No retail is yet onsite.
2. The transit stop still needs to be constructed.
3. Through the city's solid waste recycling program only.
4. The Crossings is surrounded by a high wall with no pedestrian passageways between the site and adjacent retail except along auto entrances.
5. Bus service only.
6. Asphalt has been replaced with landscaping and lawns.
7. Only minor production of arts and crafts--no food or manufacturing.
8. RiverPlace only has bus service so far, but a multiple person water ferry/taxi is planned, as is a new light rail line that will have a stop within RiverPlace.
9. Since a multiple lane freeway was onsite before RiverPlace, historic preservation and building reuse do not apply.
10. Though building structures were not saved, concrete from the mall buildings and parking lots was reused onsite.
11. No renewable energy use, but all buildings meet or exceed state efficiency standards, which are generally quite high.

Suisun City and Tualatin Commons as Case Studies

In addition to the advantages listed earlier, communities may benefit in dozens of other community-specific ways by redeveloping their downtowns. For example, Suisun City's downtown redevelopment allowed it to implement an effective dredge and fill process while enhancing the adjacent wetlands. Tualatin's development of Tualatin Commons allowed the city to safely and cost-effectively raise the core area above the 100-year floodplain.

The contrast and similarities between Suisun City, located halfway between Sacramento and San Francisco, and Tualatin, located just south of Portland, is in fact primarily why these two redevelopment projects were chosen.

Both cities have experienced rampant population growth since the 1970s, when residential developments mushroomed at their edges. Suisun City grew from just over 2,900 residents in 1970 to 27,000 today, while Tualatin swelled from under 1,000 to 19,000 in the same period. The resulting land uses are predominantly typical sprawl: subdivisions comprised of curvilinear streets and single-family homes oriented primarily for the automobile, and strip retail centers along arterial roads. Suisun City and Tualatin both

experienced a fair amount of industrial growth, but in Suisun City's case it resulted in limited access to Suisun Channel and a polluted harbor, while in Tualatin's case it resulted in additional low-density development.

Both case studies show a demonstrated commitment by city leadership and citizens in creating a pedestrian-friendly, economically viable, and unique core. In Suisun City, a number of historic buildings and environmental "amenities"--specifically, Old Town, Main Street, Suisun Channel and the harbor, and the Suisun Marsh--were already in place, allowing the city's Redevelopment Agency to



Suisun City waterfront promenade, channel, and new Civic Center.

emphasize historic preservation, building adaptive reuse, and environmental restoration. In Tualatin, however, the area of redevelopment offered little worth saving--and in fact the site was between three and six feet below the 100-year floodplain, requiring all new or renovated buildings to be raised to higher ground. The emphasis in Tualatin's case, then, was developing a city center around a new amenity--the manmade Lake of the Commons--which had beneficial impacts on the environment while giving the city a real and usable core.

Suisun City was able to pull together \$58 million in financing for city-funded activities such as purchase of property, new infrastructure, dredging the harbor, facade renovation incentives, streetscaping and landscaping, and others, using tax increment bonds that achieve success in part by including the entire city limits within the boundaries of official redevelopment. Tualatin, on the other hand, decided not to issue bonds to raise funds due to the political climate. Instead, it was forced to rely upon urban renewal funds it had already collected from previous tax increment financing. Though the city had already purchased the land, it was paid in full by the time construction on Tualatin Commons began in 1993. The city limited itself to an additional \$4.8 million for public funding of such items as the lake, promenade, public plaza, and new infrastructure. The

amount was chosen based on estimates of construction costs and the amount available “on hand” in the city’s general account reserves.

There is also an interesting difference between marketing approaches. Suisun City has undertaken relatively extensive marketing efforts on its own, utilizing the Redevelopment Agency. Tualatin, however, hired a marketing firm to work with citizens and prospective developers alike during creation of the Commons plan. Now, Suisun City wishes it had a marketing entity to promote the available parcels, while Tualatin wishes it had funding for its own marketing efforts to promote increased use by local citizens. Both cities used request-for-proposals processes to solicit bids from prospective developers.

Additionally, both initially tried to find developers who would undertake the redevelopment process for the full areas in their entirety. When those efforts failed--as in Tualatin’s case--or never came about--as in Suisun City’s case--they both decided to play a major role as “public developer.” To facilitate that, they divided the redevelopment into a number of separate parcels for sale to private developers.

And finally, both redevelopment efforts have been successful,



Tualatin Commons’s promenade, office building, restaurants, and lake.

resulting in increased economic, environmental, and social viability. While redevelopment is not complete in either case, the projects have already brought people and money back into their downtowns while creating a better environment--built and natural.

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